

Wild Acres - Habichat

For stewards of Maryland's backyard wildlife

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HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - **IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

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Short Notes...

Don't Forget the Grit!

Don't forget the grit! During the nesting season songbirds will eat calcium-rich grit to strengthen the eggshells they will be making. You can buy calcium -rich grit like crushed shells at pet shops or you can make your own grit by crushing eggshells. Small pieces of eggshell are the easiest for birds to eat. You can crush eggshells into small pieces by putting them between two sheets of wax paper and roll a rolling pin over the top.

Birds only need a little grit at a time. Offer it on a tray feeder, so birds can eat only as much as they need. You can also sprinkle it on the ground along with your birdseed.

Natural Slug Control

Laying a board in your garden creates a cool moist daytime hiding place for slugs. Turn over the board daily and you will have plenty of slugs for ovenbirds, robins and other slug eating birds.



Native Plant Profile..... Serviceberry, Shadbush, Juneberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*)

A large shrub or small deciduous tree, Serviceberry can reach 25 feet. Commonly found along woodland edges, swamps, and thickets. Grows either in clumps with several stems or small tree form. Grows well in sun or shade, but flower and fruit production greater in sun. Can tolerate a soil pH of neutral to acid.

Flowers/Fruits: Early blooming, flowers before dogwood. Flowers are white, long pedaled blossoms from March to June. Dark purple fruits from June to August are 1/3 " diameter, apple- like, sweet and can be used in pies and jellies. Produces good fruit crops yearly.

Landscape Notes: A favorite since colonial times and is stunning all year. Fall color is deep orange to rusty red. Gray bark with distinct dark vertical lines provides winter interest. Can be planted as a specimen or in a woods understory. Particularly striking when planted against evergreens. Suitable for planting along ponds and woodland edges.

Other Species: Downy Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*), Smooth Serviceberry (*Amelanchier laevis*). Both are suitable for wildlife plantings.

Serviceberries are food for: Mourning Dove, Common Flicker, Hairy, Downy and Red-headed woodpecker, Ruffed Grouse, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Blue jay, Tufted Titmouse, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Wood, Hermit and Swainson's Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, American Redstart, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern (Baltimore) Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Cardinal, Redbreasted Grosbeak, Junco, Song Sparrow, Beaver, Red fox, all species of squirrel, deer, bear. Considered one of the most important wildlife foods during the early summer.

Serviceberry flowers provide food for numerous insects. Deer and rabbits readily eat twigs, leaves and buds.



Serviceberries are cover for: Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Wood, Hermit and Swainson's Thrush.

Serviceberries are nest trees for: Eastern Kingbird, American Robin and Wood Thrush.

Additional Notes: The plant is called shadblow or shadbush since they bloom about the time the shad fish are running. The name Serviceberry comes from the colonial times. The dead from the winter were buried in the early spring when the ground thawed. This plant was is one of the first in bloom and was an indicator of a thawed ground.

Nesting Materials for Birds

Nesting birds appreciate extra supplies for building and lining their nests. Offer short, 3"-4" long pieces of string, yarn, white tissue, pet hair, dried grass, twigs and straw to supply building materials for nests. Drape the material on shrubs or tree limbs. Watch doves, robins, and orioles go for the offerings. Orioles especially like yarn.

Hummingbirds will go to an area set up especially for them. To do this, put nesting materials, especially, cotton lint, dried grass, pet hair, into an empty, swinging cage-type suet feeder. Hang this up on a limb away from any other bird feeders. Make sure it swings as this deters other birds, but hummers don't mind the movement. Some bird stores also sell nesting material in balls that you can hang in the landscape.

Providing a mud puddle will help birds such as robins, and swallows with "plaster" for their nest. Make sure the puddle is about 2' in diameter. If you make it smaller, it will dry out too quickly. Soak the area with a hose. Using a scraping tool, scrape the sides and bottom until the mud is thick. Spray it again.

Give the puddle a few days for the birds to discover it. Wet the mud puddle every other day so it does not dry out. Keep at this through out the spring and summer. You will find butterflies will also come to the mud puddle for a mineral drink!

How to Pick a Garden Center

There are several factors to consider when picking a garden center for your Wild Acre plants. As a rule all garden centers sell plants, fertilizers, garden tools etc. Service is what makes the difference. Here are some things to consider when looking for good service in a garden center.

- Personnel should be polite, attentive and knowledgeable.
- Advice on plants and landscaping should be free. Personnel should be willing to help you design your property. Make sure you provide them with the necessary information, i.e. size of area and your expectations of what you want it to look like.
- The garden center should have a landscape architect available for plans if you desire it.
- Willingness to special order material if not in stock.
- Good selection of native plants should be available. Native, locally grown plants should be your first choice.
- Do they give honest advice? Garden center staff should advise you to purchase plants that will do well in your locale. They should be able to tell you if a certain plant is not suitable even if you want it.
- Staff should be willing to answer questions you may have about your landscape either by phone or walk-in.
- Is the garden center involved in the community? Do they have programs to involve children in gardening?

With these items in mind you are ready to shop!



Window Box for Wildlife

If you have a window, you can provide a haven for wildlife. Living in the city can present challenges to Wild Acres city residents who want to provide habitat.

A window box with flowers can be attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. You can buy or build a box. Since windows can be different sizes, be sure to measure the window before you do anything and adjust the dimensions of your box accordingly.

Make sure the window box has drainage holes in the bottom of the box. The box should be easy to get to so you can water during dry spells.

Other things you can add to your wild window habitat include bird feeders that have suction cups to attach directly to the window. Use one for feed and one for water. Make sure that bird droppings or spilled seed will not cause problems with your neighbors or do not violate condominium or town house rules.

Window accidents can occur when the window is highly reflective. Birds think they see open space and run into the window. You can easily break up the reflective surface with a sun catcher or other window hanging. This can help prevent bird strikes.

Often in the spring you may have one bird repeatedly run into the window. This is caused by a bird seeing its reflection and thinking it is another bird in its territory and it is trying to drive it off. This is a seasonal event and can be corrected by hanging a towel from the inside the window or some other means of breaking the reflection.

Flowers for a wild window box include: wax begonia, petunia, marigold, nasturtium, button zinnia, scarlet sage, ageratum and garden balsam. Although many of these are not native, they are noninvasive and are extremely attractive to wildlife.

Acknowledgements

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- Photo of Serviceberry with fruit courtesy of Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.forestryimages.org
- Photo of Serviceberry in flower courtesy of Bill Cook, Michigan State University, www.forestryimages.org

Additional Information

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

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**For additional information about the Wild Acres Program
and for back issues of HABICHAT, Visit us on the DNR Website.**

<http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/wildacres.asp>

